Chapter 5

Paranoid microgroup

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Folie à famille

In psychiatric scientific publications, some cases are presented in which more than two people share a delusional system. The disorder affects all or several members of the same family, which is why it is usually called *folie à trois, folie à quatre…* or simply *folie à famille*. As in *folie à deux*, the thematic repertoire includes the same contents as delusional disorder.

> *Folie à famille.* Clinical case
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> A 44-year-old male presented to the dermatologist with a history of itching on the arms, abdomen and back. He had visited several doctors and experienced transient improvement with scabies medication and corticosteroids. The examination revealed erythematous papules that were pruritic on the trunk and limbs. No primary dermatological diagnosis was made. The investigation revealed neither infection nor infestation.
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> The patient reported that his wife as well as his daughters aged 18 and 16 had also suffered from similar complaints for years. All family members presented cutaneous lesions similar to those of the first patient. The cutaneous complaints began first in the wife after she had developed a persecution delusion whereby certain people (neighbours and relatives) intended to harm her and her family. She believed that the persecutors had inflicted a worm infestation upon her and her family. The husband and both daughters also subscribed to the delusion. The psychiatric diagnosis was paranoid disorder in the wife and shared psychotic disorder in the remaining family members. The wife was described as the dominant member of the couple, who decided the activities of the family members and influenced their attitudes. The sisters shared a symbiotic relationship with the mother and an unhealthy bond with the father. The family had been gradually isolating itself from the social network of neighbours and relatives (7).

The *folie à famille* is a rare disorder. In the bibliographic review by Mentjox (6), from 1974 to 1991, this author found only 76 descriptions of "induced psychotic disorder," of which 59 were *folies à deux* and in 17 cases the delusional system was shared by more than two people. Of these 17, only in four cases did the delusional ideas affect an entire family. However, while infrequent, the *folie à famille* may not be as extraordinary as these figures

suggest. In clinical practice I have treated two *familles folles* and I am aware of at least one other case in my professional environment.

Thus, clinical psychiatry implicitly acknowledges that in induced psychotic disorder there may in some cases be more than one person who has been infected, but always in a small number and not beyond the members of a family. The family unit would delimit the maximum perimeter of the spread of the delusion.

Domestic tyranny

It cannot be taken for granted that all domestic tyrannies must be interpreted as the manifestation of a paranoid family dynamic, but all indications suggest that, at least in many cases, this is what occurs. In fact, it is well known that IP individuals have a certain propensity toward family authoritarianism.

> Paranoia. Clinical case
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> When the head of the family is a paranoid patient, the family is frequently drawn into their suspicions, delusional ideas, or acts of aggression. They translate their paranoid ideas into action (more so than their female counterpart), imposing these upon their frightened family. Beyond this possibility of open violence, the aggression of the paranoid individual may take the form of excessive rigidity and a repressive attitude that they will impose on those around them.
>
> In the early stages of paranoid disorder, the sick father will try, as a pattern and ritual, to control his own aggression and at the same time control his family. He shows himself to be an advocate of cleanliness, order, and general inflexibility, but even with such compulsive techniques, he feels threatened and blames his family for his discomfort, as they probably do not follow the rules with sufficient exactitude. In such a situation, the wife must give up social contacts since her husband dislikes the possible influence of neighbors and friends, finding herself compelled to remain at home taking exaggerated care of it, to prevent the periodic inspections that her husband carries out.
>
> With regard to the children, he excessively monitors what they watch on television, as well as their playmates. The distrustful father always insists on being the one who makes the decisions, and if his children misbehave he blames his wife. A reserve army officer insisted that his children 'stand for inspection' every Saturday morning; he justified this ritual in the importance of discipline and in the need for tidiness. Even if the young children did not

> comply with such rules, he would 'arrest' them by forbidding them from going out to play with other children (8).

The defining element of domestic tyrannies is violence, due to its one-sidedness and its intensity; violence is not always physical, as psychological forms also exist. The victims of domestic tyrants (almost always males) are first and foremost their wives, as well as their children, who invariably also become either victims or witnesses of the aggressions. Other people living in the same household (grandparents, domestic staff) may also become additional victims.

The scientific and popular literature on domestic abuse develops in some detail two issues:

- the specific characteristics of this form of violence and the phenomena typically associated with it, and
- the interpretations regarding the origins and the mechanisms that maintain the violent behaviors of the perpetrators and the extreme tolerance toward them on the part of the victims.

In medical terms and to simplify, *the clinical picture* and *the etiology-pathophysiology*.

Let us begin with the first point. While not being exhaustive, it is convenient to recall some of the phenomena that appear to be most frequent.

In an overwhelming percentage of cases, the perpetrators are male, and the victims are their wives and children. The inverse situation must be considered exceptional.

The onset of violence is progressive. The first episode tends to appear after a long period of relationship, and the aggressions, initially, are spaced out over time. As the years go by, the frequency and severity of the episodes increase.

The violence of the male is limited to the domestic sphere, and more often than not these are not individuals known in their social circle for any particular aggressive predisposition.

> Graciela Ferreira (1989), when describing the double facade of abusive husbands, mentions that the social circle tends to attribute very positive qualities to them, based on the image they project in the extra-domestic sphere: charming, shy, respectful, supportive, understanding, tolerant, reasonable, fun, attentive, warm, and so on.

> The characteristics of the batterer, combined with the image they project, make it difficult for the *battered woman* to prove that he is the same man who abuses her. This brings with it a *double victimization of the victim* or *secondary victimization*, because the woman ends up being labeled as a liar, disturbed, unbalanced, crazy, and is attributed all the problems.
> The norm is that the batterer is well regarded and that his acquaintances, friends, and even colleagues consider him a respectable person. This mask that he constructs for himself makes it impossible to imagine the violent behavior he exercises upon his wife (3).

Despite the fact that living together is unsatisfactory for them, both members of the couple maintain a strongly dependent relationship toward their spouses, being incapable of conceiving a break in the bond. The possibility of separating terrifies them.

The aggressions are followed by reconciliations, in which the male aggressor expresses his remorse and good intentions. Frequently, the aggressions alternate with genuine *honey-moons* of passionate love.

The justifications of his own conduct by the abusive male tend to repeat themselves: (1) the man's right to do as he pleases with what is his property, (2) jealousy (sexual or non-sexual), (3) the lack of love on the part of the woman, or (4) the inadequate performance of tasks related to the home and the children. In these last three cases, the aggression serves equally to *interrogate*, as to *punish* justly, as to *educate*, modifying the way his women behave. Abusers, in other cases, rather than justifying themselves, limit themselves to explaining their conduct as a consequence of alcohol consumption or an inability to control their *temper*.

Abusive men tend to display exploitative behavior toward their women, from whom they demand servile and deferential treatment (in fact, violence has also been interpreted as an instrument with which to prolong a situation of privilege that men are interested in maintaining).

For their part, battered women defend the continuation of the relationship with the most varied arguments:

- They repeat the same justifications for the violence that their husbands expressed, thereby accepting their own culpability. They come to feel deserving of the beatings in a surprising loss of contact with reality.

- They minimize the severity of the aggressions.
- They firmly maintain that in their relationship there exists a true love that will make it possible to overcome all difficulties.
- The children and the impossibility of raising them without help.
- Their inability to fend for themselves. The fact is that battered women have usually given up their jobs, if they ever had any. But one can also observe how women who, in reality — by virtue of their education and professional experience, or by having sufficient financial resources or unconditional family support — are in fact, when examined dispassionately, in a position to get by without their husbands' cooperation express the same feeling of helplessness.

Battered women tend to distance themselves from their families and their previous social environment, and less frequently, so do the men.

All retrospective studies of abusive men point to a high prevalence of domestic violence in their own families of origin. This is not, however, a prerequisite*sine qua non*.

With the repetition of the aggressions, battered women undergo a profound change of character and become withdrawn and insecure individuals, losing their spontaneity and initiative.

Almost universally, sexuality degenerates into mechanical, rapid relations that are, at least for the woman, unsatisfying. Closely associated with jealousy, hypersexuality occurs with a certain frequency. Jealous husbands demand sexual relations with a frequency disproportionate to the situation and the age of both members of the couple. It is common for abusive males to attempt to impose on their wives unwanted sexual practices (oral sex, *menage à trois*, etc) as well as complete acceptance of their infidelities.

Although the dangerousness tends to be limited to the domestic sphere, it can extend to the woman's family members and friends, who are occasionally also victims of the attacks.

To recapitulate, one is struck by the existence — within some families — of a form of violence with unique profiles that distinguish it from other forms of human aggression:

- The tyrants/aggressors tend to restrict their violence to the domestic sphere, behaving outside the home as peaceful and even affable individuals; it is, therefore, an unusually selective and unusually persistent form of violence.

- The victims appear strangely tolerant of their situation, minimize it, justify it, resist using the personal and social resources that would allow them to escape their aggressors and, when they do… it is often only to end up returning, with no apparent need to do so.

Persistent aggression and tolerance of it tend to be associated with another set of phenomena that define a characteristic profile. They are as follows:

- Ardor, passion, and impetuosity.
- Isolation from one's surroundings.
- Hostility directed toward specific individuals in one's surroundings or toward the world in general (or toward one's own family).
- The fusion of the members of the couple into an entity with a single voice, the same reflections, opinions and expressions, etc.
- The asymmetry between the two members of the couple.
- The persistent fear of betrayal.

What does this profile have to do with paranoia or paranoid personality?

Could we admit the hypothesis that within the family as a whole an intense paranoid contagion might occur?

The hypothesis thatthere existed a kind of*paranoid families*(in which violence is but one more characteristic, not always present) with a relationship to*folie à famille*parallel to that which exists between paranoid personality and delusional disorder?

Or that of such families being a particular form of those*groups*

*a) highly cohesive*that share

b) paranoid beliefs(the cults), only of very small size and with a membership that is not determined by individual affiliation but by consanguinity, cohabitation and the institution of marriage?

In response to this last question:

a) The tendency to isolate oneself from one's surroundings and strong interdependence are two phenomena widely described in the literature on abuse that make it possible, indeed, to speak of couples and families *strongly cohesive*… Listening to the accounts of family

members, it is common to hear phrases such as "they go everywhere together," or "they don't let anyone interfere in their lives," or "we know almost nothing about them, they're barely seen…"

b) If the members of some cults (DSM *dixit*) have in common a belief system of paranoid tonality, might there be some type of discourse —with that same paranoid bias— characteristic of domestic tyrannies? In our cultural context it is possible to identify in them at least three recurring themes: one expresses distrust, another pride, and the third, utopia (a microutopia limited to the domestic environment).

The theme of *betrayal* (feared, imagined, or deliriously held by the man and felt by the woman, against all evidence and against all logic, in the form of *guilt*) whereby the woman would have broken a pact of fidelity in the sexual realm, or in that of devotion, or in that of dedication and affection.

The theme of *male superiority*, because nature dictates it so, or tradition… or God.

And the theme of "loving too much," of *perfect love*, passionate, absolute, without cracks, without contradictions, without fluctuations… This matter of boundless love refers us to erotomania and mystical delusions and reminds us of the group of reformers, who dream of a perfect society in which every form of selfishness or conflict has been definitively banished.

The parallels between family tyranny and the cult go somewhat further. Is it not in cults where the most extreme forms of sustained violence and exploitation occur, and the most surprising cases of uncritical acceptance of such behavior by the victims? Anyone who has interviewed members and former members of cult groups knows firsthand to what extent the experience of great solidarity and even intense love among group members, and toward the leader, go hand in hand with authoritarianism, exploitation, and terror.

> Ant Hill Kids
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> One of the most bizarre and violent cults in North American history was described in 1993 in a Canadian weekly. Known as the Ant Hill Kids and led by Roch Theriault. The group lived communally in remote parts of Canada. Theriault, who is serving a life sentence, 'killed at least two of his followers, castrated two others, and cut off the arm of another. He is known to be the father of at least 25 children born to eight different women' (9).

Democratic Workers Party

Militants were punished for anything, and those awaiting 'judgment' could be expelled (that is, eliminated from party life), punished with a punitive suspension (forbidden to speak to anyone, meaning living in total silence, sometimes for six months), placed under house arrest, or made to stand guard for twenty-four hours. One militant sat for several hours with the leader who, drunk, pointed a gun at his head (9).

The cult couple and family

In specialized consultations on problems related to cults or *manipulation groups* (as they are also called), which are attended mainly by the immediate family members of those affected, a curious profile of cases can be seen, which Janja Lalich (9) calls *one-person cults* and which several authors in our peninsula prefer to identify as cases of *one-person manipulation*.

Family members describe a profound and inexplicable transformation in the behavior of the affected person, identical to that typically induced by cult groups and which is described in the popular literature on cults, but which would have come about following the beginning of a romantic relationship. They often wonder whether *behind it* there might be a cult, with their inquiries yielding a negative result. The clinical history likewise reveals changes that *in no way* differ from the profound changes induced by cult groups.

These courtship-cults and marriage-cults constitute, in our experience, 20% of those who attend a consultation specialized in cult or manipulation groups.

Less frequent is the case in which those same changes occur following entry into a family, via pairing. These are families in which there is, habitually, strong leadership on the part of one of their members.

Let us look at an extreme example, drawn from the media, of one of those families that, no matter how you look at it, can be confused with a cult.

Marcus Wesson

The story that emerges from the Marcus Wesson trial rivals a novel by Anne Rice, with testimonies of incest, child marriages, vampiric aliases, coffin beds, and an apocalyptic obsession that led a former bank teller to transform his extended family into a secluded cult.

Wesson, 58, is accused of killing nine of his children, including seven he fathered with his own daughters and nieces. He is also accused of abuse and rape. The victims of the killer, ranging in age from 1 to 25, were discovered at the family's home on March 12, 2004, following a confrontation with police over a custody matter.

Each had received a single gunshot through an eye and had been stacked in a back bedroom surrounded by antique coffins.

The prosecution states that Wesson had taught that it was better for the family to die and "go together to the Lord" than to be separated by child protective services.

The case horrified Fresno, where many people were watching live television when Wesson, a heavyset man whose braids hung like a garment below his waist, emerged from his house wearing a blood-soaked shirt and a menacing stare.

He maintains that his 25-year-old daughter, Sebhrenah, carried out the crimes of her own accord and then killed herself. Her 18-month-old son with Wesson, Marshey, died in the massacre.

Some evidence suggests that it was indeed Sebhrenah Wesson who fired the shots. The .22 handgun was found under her arm, and her DNA was on the pistol. Her sister and cousins described her as a gun fanatic who enjoyed playing soldiers.

Witnesses, including those who still profess loyalty to Wesson, have described him as a domestic dictator who had adopted a homemade brew of evangelical Christianity, occultism, and sexual mania.

Raised as a Seventh-day Adventist, Wesson worked for some time at a bank, according to his wife, but began telling people that God spoke through him and that the end of times was approaching. He went on to care for a woman 13 years his senior in San José, had a daughter with her, and married her 15-year-old daughter, Elizabeth. He had ten children with Elizabeth, and his sister gave him 7 children to raise.

Wesson homeschooled them and said he could not work because he had to keep his divine knowledge 'anonymous'.

For a time the family lived in a tent in the mountains and a boat on the northern coast of California. They had little money. In a diary read during the trial this week, a daughter,Kiani, lamented that they had nothing to eat but rice.

Wesson maintained strict discipline, beating even the youngest children with a stick- when they misbehaved. Two jurors began to cry when Solorio recalled how he beat his one-month-old son, a son of his, until his legs bled because the baby would not stop crying.

When she testified that he had stabbed her in the chest fortalking about leaving the family, a woman on the jury let out a shriek of surprise. Solorio subsequently showed the jury the wound on her chest.

The most striking testimony relates to Wesson's sexual tendencies. According to the witnesses, he kept the sisters apart from the boys. 'So that we would not have sexual feelings toward them or other men,' recalled his niece Rudy Ortiz. The females were required to wear kerchiefs on their chests and long skirts.

The girls raised by Wesson,now young women in their twenties, testified that when they reached the age of 8, Wesson would begin what he called 'loving', sexually abusing them in their beds.

'He did it so that we would become better women,' testified a 23-year-old niece,Rosa Solorio.

According to the witnesses, Wesson said that his behavior was consistent with the Bible and that 'Jesus was a womanizer'. The family studied the Bible three times a day, with Wesson interpreting the passages for the group. Among his favorites were those dealing with polygamy.

'The people of God are dying out,' Sofina Solonio remembered him saying. 'We have to preserve the children of God. We must have more children for the Lord.'

He married several of his nieces and daughters to himself in domestic ceremonies.

Wesson had children with three of his nieces and two of his daughters. They said the girls had gone to a sperm bank to be artificially inseminated.

The Wessons moved to the residence where the murder took place about six months before. According to witnesses in the building, which had been built for commercial purposes, it was very cold. To keep warm, the children slept in old coffins collected by Wesson.

Some witnesses have stated that Wesson planned to use the coffins to make furniture, but that the wooden boxes formed part of his obsession with life and death. He was fascinated by vampires, in whom he saw similarities with Jesus Christ.

'Both live forever and are immortal,' Rosa Solorio explained to the jury.

He gave his children vampire names, including his one-year-old son and his daughter Kiani. He called the boy 'Jeva', a combination of Jesus and vampire. He referred to himself as 'Je Vam Marc Sus Pire'.

The world created by Wesson came to an abrupt end. Two renegade nieces heard that he was planning to take his family to the State of Wshington, where his parents lived. The women,

> Sofina Solorio and Ruby Ortiz, had left the children they had with Wesson in his care, and returned to reclaim them on March 12, 2004, accompanied by a dozen relatives.
> Witnesses recounted that Wesson addressed the mothers' demands calmly, while the women in the house reaccinaban with anger.
> 'Judas! Judas!' and 'Bow down before your master' were the words their daughters said to Solorio and Ortiz, according to the testimony.
> An hour after the police arrived at the residence, the children were dying and Wesson was being arrested (10).

It is highly probable that, had a psychiatrist been called to give their opinion at the trial, they would have diagnosed a messianic-persecutory delusion with a clearly identifiable inducer (Wesson himself) and a number of induced individuals. Everything would find explanation in a primary fact, the delusion, and in its subsequent contagion. On the other hand, it is likely that, were the same case viewed by a psychologist or social worker specializing in abuse, they would minimize the religious content, focusing instead on male violence and on the paralysis that terror produces in victims. Even if the individual in question is mentally ill, their behavior would be seen above all as the consequence of a cultural pattern transmitted from generation to generation. Finally, if the expert called to testify were a specialist in manipulation groups, they would tend to think that, as in other cults, a psychopath hungry for power and pleasure uses lies and "brainwashing techniques" in the service of their personal interests.

We believe that the distinction between delusional families, abusive families, and sectarian families (or family cults) contains a certain degree of artificiality, with significant areas of overlap existing among them. Thus, in some cases initially diagnosed as a "sectarian relationship" there eventually emerges a delusional framework. And it is for this very reason that, if we give credence to what has been published in the literature, a good many cases of *folie à deux* are also domestic tyrannies — they were so before and continue to be so after the appearance of delusional ideas.

From the perspective of the *paranoid model*, the primary phenomenon is the contagion of said behavioral pattern through the vehicle of interpersonal relationships. The delusions (of delusional families), the violence (of abusive families), and those behaviors interpreted as "brainwashing techniques" (of family cults) are nothing but manifestations of paranoid

activation in each of the members of the group.aranoide en cada uno de los miembros del grupo.

Other paranoid microgroups

On the other hand, there are *unipersonal cults* that are grounded in dyadic relationships other than that of the romantic couple.

> Other examples of unipersonal cults can be found in very different situations: boss/employee relationship, religious figure/worshipper, therapist/client, jailer/prisoner, interrogator/suspect, teacher/student… (9).

From the paranoid family to the cult

We have just discussed the significant degree of overlap that exists between the different types of paranoid family and couple, and to what extent the boundaries between them are blurred. Another area of overlap to which I would also like to dedicate a few lines is the one that exists between these paranoid microgroups and the *paranoid groups* of greater size, whose prime example are the cults.

Observing the history of numerous sectarian groups, what stands out is the fact that they often have their origin in a paranoid family, subject to a strong charismatic leadership, to which new followers with no kinship or sentimental ties subsequently become attached. These families, fanatically devoted to some cause, therapeutic method, etc., over time ended up blurring the boundaries between the genuine family members and the followers who were being added. In this way, imperceptibly, the consanguineous family transforms into something larger: a cult.

A case worthy of mention is that of the *prophet children* (*and messiahs*) whose extraordinary nature was revealed to their parents during their earliest infancy or even during pregnancy. I have recently had the opportunity to witness one of those children nursed in delusion, before a large and spellbound audience, displaying a breathtaking oratory… at the age of five!

Let us now look at an example of the transition from an (atypical) family to a (small) sectarian group:

Paranoid commune. The Family of Charles Manson

[...] Charles Manson was born on November 12, 1934, in a humble home in Cincinnati (Ohio). His mother, Kathleen Maddox, was 15 years old when she ran away from home, fleeing from tremendously religious and strict parents. Barely a year later she brought Charlie into the world, the product of her relationship with a casual lover. The boy was given the surname Manson, from William Manson, an older man whom Kathleen — vivacious, fond of drinking, and prone to falling in love — had been married to for a few months. In the newspapers, 35 years later, Kathleen was labeled a 'teenage prostitute', something that did not sit well with Manson: 'She left home for the same reasons as the kids in my *family*. I liked my mother; I loved her.'

In 1940, Kathleen was convicted of robbing a gas station, and Charlie, who had just turned six, went to live with relatives until she got out of prison two years later. After their reunion, a five-year period followed that was happy for Manson despite the instability, as his mother constantly changed homes, cities, and bedmates. One fine day, Kathleen found a man willing to marry her as long as he did not have to take care of the boy, and so Charlie, who was 12 years old, was left at the mercy of social services and was placed in a poorhouse where he spent his days crying and praying. After a few months he escaped and tried to return to his mother, convinced that she would lovingly take him into her arms, but the reality was quite different: 'She turned me in. The next day I was back in the poorhouse. That was when I decided I was not going to cry anymore. I only felt hatred and bitterness.'

Further escape attempts preceded his admission, at age 13, into a special-regime shelter for difficult cases, where he received savage beatings from the guards, was raped by the older boys, and got accustomed to hitting back. From there he also escaped, and learned to live on the streets and to steal cars. During his adolescence, Charlie passed through four other public 'educational centers', until, upon turning 19, he was released on parole; it was the month of May 1954, and he had become a fairly attractive young man.

He found his first job at a racetrack, where he was in charge of piling up manure. After numerous sexual experiences, some with boys, he had his first 'stable' relationship with a waitress. They ended up getting married and seemed happy, but as their financial precari-ousness worsened when she became pregnant, Charlie went back to stealing cars, landing in prison before the baby was born. At first, his wife would visit him with the child, but she later abandoned him and Manson never saw them again. After regaining his freedom in 1958, he tried to make a living as a pimp, giving way to a period of continuous arrests, probation

periods, and more detentions. In 1960 he was sentenced to ten years in prison for forging a check for $37.50. He was 26 years old and had a profession: small-time criminal.

At the island penitentiary of Terminal Island, near Los Angeles, the inmate Manson received additional instruction: he learned to play the guitar and compose music, and read books on Scientology, hypnosis, psychology, and Hinduism, as well as the Bible. There, this man of easy speech and sarcastic humor was respected. When after seven years he was released, he had become an expert in the art of keeping the strongest at a distance and manipulating the weak.

California, July 1967: the 'summer of love'. The ex-inmate Manson is left astonished to see how the world has changed since 1960. The slogan 'make love not war' is on everyone's lips [...] Feeling welcomed everywhere, he wonders whether he has not been born again. He finds himself in heaven.

Especially when Mary Brunner, a 23-year-old librarian, takes him into her home. Beneath her appearance of a formal and modest woman, Mary is quite a pioneer of ecological activism. The idea of environmental protection is entirely new to Manson, who soon perceives its motivating force and lucrative potential. Governments, companies, teachers, parents, the judges and jailers who have abused him... all of it is part of the oppressive system that exploits the planet and destroys it. He has finally found his worldview and preaches it eloquently before an audience of young people who listen to him with fervor: 'I will show you the way to save the Earth and put an end to the powers that destroy it. But it is you who must take the step; I am only a prisoner on probation and they are waiting for any opportunity to lock me up again'.

Just as Mary Brunner stimulated Manson's intellect, he was her guide in the sexual realm. And he must have been very persuasive, because she allowed Darlene, a 16-year-old girl Charlie had picked up off the street, to come and live in her home. The triangle seemed to get along very well, for following the motto 'no one belongs to anyone; love is universal', Manson frolicked with Darlene during the day and spent his nights with Mary. This was the origin of The Family.

Shortly thereafter, she left her job at the university library and the three of them set off to travel California in an old school bus, visiting communes and recruiting new acolytes. Soon fifteen girls had gathered on board, two of them 14 years old, and four or five boys. In command, an ever more arrogant and self-assured Manson.

The *troupe* became the attraction of the west coast, from Oregon to Los Angeles, and millionaires, musicians and Hollywood stars fell prey to the fascination with that love caravan filled with young girls eager for adventure. The doors of the mansions opened for The Family, whose presence was welcomed at the wildest parties. Dennis Wilson, drummer for the Beach Boys, put them up at his home [...] The song appears credited to Dennis Wilson, but both the lyrics and the music seem copied from a piece composed by Manson. He is furious; he knows he has talent, he works to forge a career for himself, and then those wealthy pop stars who live in luxurious mansions come along and swindle him. Pigs!

Such being the case, we come to the summer of 1969, remembered for the massive Woodstock festival. The Family resides at the Spahn ranch and is held together by sex, music, psychedelic trips and the conviction that their way of life is the right one, unlike that proclaimed by conventional families and the representatives of the established order. Nevertheless, despite the fact that some members of the inner circle remain faithful to the ideal of peace and love, economic hardship lurks around the group and Manson returns to stealing cars and associating with former prison companions, fences and petty thieves.

Finally, two *drug deals* trigger the spiral of violence. On one hand, Charles Manson shoots at a Black man who was involved in a dispute over a marijuana stash with Family member Tex Satson, aged 23; from that moment on, Charlie will live in fear of revenge from Black radicals.

For his part, another Family member, musician Bobby Beausoleil, aged 25, becomes embroiled in a fight with music teacher and mescaline dealer Gary Hinman. Days later, Manson, Beausoleil and one of the group's girls, Susan Atkins, show up at Hinman's house to demand money from him. When he refuses, Manson cuts off one of his ears and leaves the scene, telling his acolytes: 'Do with him what you will'. On July 31, the dealer's body was found stabbed repeatedly; Beausoleil was arrested for murder while driving Hinman's car.

Two violent crimes, panic over Black radicals and fear of the police: paranoia grows within the heart of The Family. There is an urgent need to find a hideout, and Manson finds one in an isolated, abandoned ranch located far from Los Angeles, on the edges of Death Valley. The Baker ranch becomes the sanctuary where The Family prepares to live through the end of the world. Blending quotations from the Bible and Beatles songs, seasoned with a few drops of racial hatred and ecological terrorism, Charlie has developed the theory — blindly accepted by his followers — that the Apocalypse is imminent: the fifth angel appearing in that biblical

book is none other than Manson ('the son of man', in English), while the four who precede him are the Beatles themselves.

In his delusion, Manson sees himself as the exterminating angel sent to punish the ungodly who harm the Earth and 'do not bear the seal of God on their foreheads.' Manson believes that the end of the world will come through a violent race war in which Black people will destroy all white people except for The Family, who will survive in their desert hideout and rise again to reclaim white power and save the Earth. All they have to do is wait for the 'stupid Black people' to start the battle once and for all.

In early August, MaryBrummer —who by that time had had a child by Manson— was arrested while attempting to make purchaseswith stolen credit cards. This event causes Charlie to lose his nerve, and he decides that the time has come to act, given that the Black radicals do not seem willing to take the initiative.

[...] It was the cleaning lady who discovered thebodies. On top of a pool of blood, on the lawn, lay a man and a woman, while a third corpse was visible inside the car parked nearby. Terrified, she ran off, screaming hysterically, toward the neighbors' house.

This Dantesque scene caused the police officers to shudder minutes later as they followed the bloody trail that led to Polanski's mansion. They were greeted by the word*pigs* written in blood on the door. In the living room lay Sharon Tate, dead, lying on her side in a fetal position, barely covered by a bra and a pair of floral underwear. Several stab wounds stood out on her body, and on her abdomen, swollen due to eight months of pregnancy, an X had been carved with a knife. The white rope tied around her neck was linked to the throat of a fifth victim, a man who had been mutilated, stabbed, and marked with numerous X's carved into his skin. As a finishing touch, the killers had covered his head with a blood-soaked towel.

But the horror, far from over, continued to unfold in Los Angeles until Sunday afternoon, when FrankStruthers, age 15, entered the home of his mother, Rosemary, 36, and his stepfather, Leno LaBianca, 44, owner of a supermarket in the upscale neighborhood of Los Feliz. The young man foundLaBianca on the living room floor with his head encased in a blood-soaked pillowcase. A kitchen knife had been plunged into his throat, his pajamas had been torn to shreds, and protruding from his abdomen was a long two-pronged fork with an ivory handle. Frank fled in terror.

Her mother's body was discovered by police in the bedroom. Rosemary La Bianca lay face down in a pool of blood, her pink nightgown rolled up around her neck; her back, buttocks and legs covered in stab wounds, and her head covered by a pillowcase. Three blood-written

> inscriptions were found in the dwelling: *death to pigs* ("death to pigs"), *rise* ("rise up") and *helter skelter* ("confusion and chaos").
>
> The forensic tally of that sinister weekend yielded the following figures: Sharon Tate received 16 stab wounds; Jay Sebring, seven stab wounds and a gunshot wound; Abigail Folger, 28 stab wounds; Voytec Frykowski, 51 knife wounds, two gunshot wounds and 13 blows to the head (he probably fought back before dying); Steven Parent, four gunshots and a stab wound; Rosemary La Bianca, 41 wounds inflicted with a knife and fork; and Leno La Bianca, 26 stab wounds. On his abdomen, beside the carving fork, the word *war* ("war") had been carved with a knife.
>
> The trial lasts a year and a half. Manson is the devil, but he has not killed anyone: the three angelic girls who have done it for him scandalize the world when they cheerfully confess their leading role in the massacre, which they would have carried out as 'an act of love'. In March 1971, Manson, Susan Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel and Leslievan Houten were sentenced to death. A sentence that was commuted to life imprisonment following the abolition of capital punishment.
>
> [...] He has been lucky and has grown old in prison, where he manages his website and publishes books on rock music and biblical interpretations (4).

The case of Charles Manson, which should not be regarded as an oddity, illustrates to perfection this overlap between apparently disparate phenomena: a psychopath who shifts into a paranoid, a paranoid who sets himself up as a leader, a couple that transforms into a bigamous family and, imperceptibly, into a murderous commune… in which it is not far-fetched to make a diagnosis of induced psychotic disorder… while at the same time being a small cult that could have experienced significant growth had the senseless crimes not taken place…

This lengthy quotation also serves as a reminder of that mention in the DSM-III-R which states that patients with grandiose delusions "may be overrepresented among the leaders of religious groups and other more or less marginal associations" (1).

Delusions and paranoid beliefs

As we move from the individual to the couple, from the couple to the microgroup, and to the group and to totalitarian society, that is, as the size of the group grows, the concept of *delusion* becomes more uncomfortable and unmanageable, which is why it becomes preferable to limit ourselves to speaking of *paranoid ideas or beliefs*.

When several thousand followers of a Hindu cult — many of them educated, middle-class Western citizens — proclaim the cataclysmic imminence of the Kali era and the advent of a new civilization founded on harmonious coexistence with cows, or when several dozen Korean followers of a Protestant pastor travel to a small Texan town to receive Jesus Christ — whose physical appearance they assume to be identical to that of their (Oriental) pastor — who will descend from the heavens in a tin-foil UFO, then the psychiatrist avoids qualifying these claims as delusional because "when evaluating the possible presence of a delusional disorder, the individual's cultural and religious background must be taken into account" (2). It is obvious that there is a certain arbitrariness in this distinction whereby an idea is classified as delusional when it is held by an individual in isolation or shared with a few first-degree relatives or a small group of individuals, yet equally absurd ideas that are "inaccessible to logical argumentation" lose their delusional character when they are shared by a larger number of people. Millions of Germans firmly believed in the Hitlerian persecutory delusions regarding a secret Jewish conspiracy to seize control of the planet, and collaborated in a policy of harassment and extermination consistent with those delusions. For a Psychiatry that wishes to appear respectful of the freedom of affiliation and belief, and to remain removed from ideological battles, the refusal to recognize such ideas as delusional — that is, as a medical problem — constitutes a pragmatic solution… but perhaps a mistaken one.

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